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(54) Gaming and amusement machines

(57) In a gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine, following a surprise jackpot award given on rare random occasions at the start of a game or at the end of a non-winning game, the player is given a high-odds chance (e.g. fifty-fifty) directly on the following game of the award being repeated, and then, if the award is repeated, he is given another high-odds chance of the award being repeated again, and so on. The jackpot award, and each of the repeated awards, may be a jackpot prize or a feature which gives the chance of a jackpot prize, for example, a 'nudge' feature.

GB 2 180 087 A

SPECIFICATION

Gaming and amusement machines

- 5 This invention relates to gaming and amusement machines of the kind generally known as "fruit machines", in particular an "amusement-with-prizes" machine.

Currently there are, in fruit machines, numerous "features" which follow a non-winning spin of the reels, such as the chance of one or more nudges, or holds, or so-called "trails", which can build up to a possible chance of a jackpot. Indeed the value of prizes awarded in a given machine on the features in many cases exceeds that of the prizes awarded on the achievement of a winning line in the initial game.

It is also well-known, when a win is achieved in the initial game, to give the player a chance to gamble all or part of his win on a "double-or-quits" basis, or sometimes on a more complicated basis.

The aim of the present invention is to offer the player the possibility of winning a surprise jackpot which may be repeated. According to the invention we propose that, not only is the player given a surprise jackpot award on rare random occasions at the start of a game or at the end of a non-winning game, but, following such an award there is also a high-odds chance (for example fifty-fifty) directly on the following game of the award being repeated, (with the same or a different amount) and then, if the award is repeated, there is yet another high-odds chance on the next game of the award being repeated again. This high-odds repeat sequence could even be continued indefinitely, so that in theory there is no limit to the number of awards given, although it will be appreciated that the odds (assuming they are fifty-fifty each time) of the award being repeated twice are only one in four, and of the award being repeated three times in succession they are only one in eight, and so on.

The surprise jackpot award, and each of the repeated awards, if given, may be a jackpot prize (achieved, for instance, by the reels being spun to a pre-arranged combination that awards a jackpot).

Alternatively, the surprise jackpot award, and each of the repeated awards, if given, may comprise a feature which gives a chance of a jackpot prize (for instance, a random or fixed number of nudges may be awarded or a time period may be set within which the player has the opportunity of "nudging" the reels to a winning combination).

The value of the jackpot award given may be different on successive steps in the sequence, and could be on an increasing or decreasing scale.

The high-odds repeat sequence makes the machine more attractive to play since there is the possibility that a player can win several jackpot prizes in succession. Also the possibility that the player may be unexpectedly awarded a surprise jackpot or a surprise chance to win a jackpot increase the attractiveness of the machine.

It is to be appreciated that the high-odds chance of a jackpot award being repeated is considerably greater than the random chance of a jackpot prize or feature being awarded during normal play of the

machine. This also encourages the player to continue playing the machine after he has gained a surprise jackpot award. The high-odds chance may be approximately a fifty-fifty chance. Preferably the high-odds chance is slightly less than a fifty-fifty chance (for example forty-nine - fifty-one).

The initiation of the awarding of a jackpot may be effected by the player pressing a special button (which is lit up when the chance is on offer, that is on a rare random occasion when a surprise award is given). However, the award, is preferably obtained by pressing the normal "start" button, and can only be done if the player is already in credit. Likewise, if the offer comes up a second time, it only comes up if the player is in credit, and this applies each successive time.

In a typical example, on rare occasions following a non-winning game (typically once in 800 games), the insertion of a coin to start a first game results in a special panel being illuminated, indicating the surprise jackpot award. (If the player already has one or more game credits in the machine then the panel will light up on completion of the previous game). The player then knows that he will with certainty obtain a jackpot award of some level. In one embodiment to obtain the surprise jackpot award he presses the "start" button and the reels will automatically be spun to halt at one of two possible pre-determined combinations resulting in a higher or lower jackpot of, say, £3 or £1.00. In another embodiment the special panel may indicate that nudges are available as the surprise jackpot award, for instance on the basis of a set time period within which the player has the chance to "nudge" the reels to a jackpot prize. The maximum win obtainable from the nudges may be indicated on the machine. Following the surprise award, provided he is still in credit, there is an immediate forty-nine - fifty-one chance that the panel will be illuminated again, giving him either the certainty of a further jackpot or, the chance to nudge the reels to a jackpot. If he is not already in credit, there is still a forty-nine - fifty-one chance that when he inserts a coin, a further jackpot prize or nudges will be offered. In the first embodiment, when the "start" button is pressed this again results in the reels spinning automatically to predetermined positions awarding a higher or lower jackpot which may or may not be the same as the previous one. Directly on the next game there is a forty-nine - fifty-one chance of the panel lighting up yet again, and the process is repeated indefinitely until the machine reverts to a normal game.

In a modification, if, say, a £1 jackpot is awarded or gained by nudging, the player may be given the opportunity of gambling this to increase it at the risk of losing it altogether.

It will be understood that the term "surprise jackpot award" as used herein refers broadly to any type of surprise jackpot prize or feature. For instance the award may comprise the amount of coins, tokens or nudges indicated by an illuminated jackpot panel or by a jackpot "meter" in the form of an L.E.D. or an alphanumeric display, there being a high-odds chance of the same or a different amount being awarded directly on the next game. The award may even

comprise a "wild reel feature" in which after the reels have been spun at least one of the symbols is illuminated to indicate that that reel is wild to produce a winning combination with the symbols on the other
 5 reels. Another possibility is that the award may comprise a hold feature in which, for example, one reel is held and the other reels automatically spin to a matching winning combination. The essence of the present invention is that a surprise jackpot award is
 10 given and there is then a high odds chance of the award being repeated directly on the next game.

When we have spoken above of jackpots and awards it will be understood that we specify no particular lower limit, and the system according to the
 15 invention could, if desired, be applied to relatively low awards. Also, where we have spoken of reels being spun, it will be understood that we intend this term to cover also the known non-mechanical equivalent of reels, such as Panascope or video displays.
 20 Again, the term "fruit machine" is intended to cover any machine in which a sequential display of an array of successive symbols is halted at random and certain resulting combinations of symbols are then awarded prizes.

25 CLAIMS

1. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind known as a fruit machine in which not only
 30 is the player given a surprise jackpot award, on rare random occasions, at the start of a game or following a non-winning game, but, following such an award, there is also a high-odds chance directly on the following game of the award being repeated, and then,
 35 if the award is repeated, there is another high-odds chance on the next game of the award being repeated again.

2. A machine as claimed in claim 1 in which the high-odds chance is approximately a fifty-fifty chance.
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3. A machine as claimed in claim 2 in which the high-odds chance is slightly less than a fifty-fifty chance.

4. A machine as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3 in which the jackpot award and each of the repeated awards, if given, comprises a jackpot prize.
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5. A machine as claimed in claim 4 in which the jackpot prize is achieved by the reels being spun to a pre-arranged combination that awards a jackpot.

50 6. A machine as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3 in which the jackpot award, and each of the repeated awards, if given, comprises a feature which gives the chance of a jackpot prize.

7. A machine as claimed in claim 6 in which the
 55 feature giving the chance of a jackpot prize is a nudge feature.

8. A machine as claimed in claim 7 in which an award can only be repeated if the player is in credit, or if not in credit, when a coin is inserted into the
 60 machine.

9. A machine as claimed in claim 8 in which the jackpot award, or each of the repeated awards, if given, is obtained by the player pressing the normal "start" button.

65 10. A machine as claimed in any preceding claim

in which the rare random occasions when the player is given a surprise jackpot award occur approximately once in 800 games.

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